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ABSTRACT

This course syllabus for high school students is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on an introduction to gerontology, and Part II on demographic aspects of aging. Course objectives include the following: (1) to develop student comprehension of the demographic data of aging; (2) to develop knowledge of the basic psychology of aging; (3) to develop understanding of the basic social and physical aspects of aging; (4) to develop knowledge of the economics of aging; and (5) to develop student initiative through individual projects related to gerontology. Content objectives focus upon an examination of current theories and concepts about aging, an understanding of the older person, a modification of attitudes and correction of misconceptions about stereotypes of aging, and an understanding of total life span development. (Author/KA)

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A COURSE OF STUDY ON AGING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

by Phillip Randall

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A COURSE OF STUDY ON AGING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

I. INTRODUCTION

This course syllabus is divided into two parts. Part I focuses on an introduction to gerontology, and Part II on demographic aspects of aging.

The stated objectives are general enough to permit a variety of learning activities to be developed.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. To develop student comprehension of the demographic data of aging.

The student will further his comprehension of the demographic data of aging by his ability:

1. To compare the statistical dimensions of aging within populations.
2. To differentiate past and present trends in life cycles.
3. To construct a basic foundation for projection into future years within known limits.

B. To develop student knowledge of the basic psychology of aging.

The student will further his knowledge of psychology of aging by his ability:

1. to explain the developmental process
2. to describe at least two cases of adaptive behavior
3. to list four cultural stereotypes of old age
4. to compare learning and memory

C. To develop student understanding of the basic social aspects of aging.

The student will further his understanding of the social aspects of aging by his ability:

1. to contrast the different generations in his or her own family
2. to discriminate between the activity and disengagement theories
3. to write a paper on the effect of retirement on a retired person's social life

D. To develop student understanding of the physical aspects of aging.

The student will further his awareness of the physiological aspects of aging by his ability:

1. to describe the basic life cycle concept
2. to name at least three organic degenerations of old age
3. to list preventive measures which may prolong the life span

E. To develop student knowledge of the economics of aging.

The student will further his knowledge of the economics of aging by his ability:

1. to list the sources of income for old persons (retired).
2. to compare the income of working men or women and retired men or women

3. to explain budgeting

F. To develop student initiative through individual projects, related to gerontology.

The student will have used his own initiative:

1. to keep a file of gerontological research as a long range project
2. to locate information in gerontology reference books
3. to develop an original project

Part I: Content Objectives

1. To examine current theories and concepts about aging.
2. To undetstand the older person (in or out of the family).
3. To modify attitudes and correct conceptions about stereotypes of aging.
4. To undetstand total life span development.

I. Definitions of Aging and Aged

A. All living matter ages, and, as it ages, it changes. As living organisms grow older, there is capacity for self-repair.

B. Aging is a biological, psychological, and sociological process that goes on from the time of conception, to birth, to death. It is that element in life pertaining to passage of time. Thus, living is inseparable from aging.

C. Aging is an individualized process. "Old age" is a quality of mind and body whose onset varies between individuals.

D. From the functional point of view, many persons are relatively "young" at 65 years of age. There is often a lesser relationship between chronological age and functional capacity than is thoroughly understood or considered.

II. Understanding the Older Person

Old age, like any state in the life cycle, has its own rewards. Anyone working with older people needs to be aware of and to build on their strengths and potentialities rather than to see only their weaknesses. Some of the positives with which an individual creates a satisfying life are:

A. Longevity, making for prolonged, additional, or varied experience.

B. Maturity, providing understanding, adjustment to, and acceptance of one's life situation.

C. Insight, directing one to recognize, to emphathize with, and help to resolve problems and stresses of oneself and others.

D. Expertise, permitting one to offer his knowledge and abilities for advice and assistance.

E. Freedom, allowing one to attempt new activities, create and reach toward new goals.

F. Reflection, giving thought to purposes and expectations of life and to acceptance of mortality.

III. Attitudes about Aging and Being Aged

Ideals about the aged are inherited from two contradictory traditions: (a) The classical Greek view expresses aging as "an unmitigated misfortune," and (b) The Old Testament holds age to be the summit of life, with great age viewed as a sign of innate virtue and divine blessing.

In a primitive society in which knowledge must be transmitted from generation to generation, the older a man, the more knowledgeable he will be and more dependent upon him are the other members of the tribe.

IV. Theoretical Concepts of Age

Historically, investigations into the process by which living matter ages

are relatively recent. Many theories have been formulated about the physical, psychological, and social processes concerning aging and why and how it occurs. The effect that large numbers of aged persons have upon a society and the effect that the societal impact has upon the aged person are matters for further exploration and study.

Certain theories have substantiation and special usefulness in social work with older persons. Understanding the aging process and aged persons in our society involves many disciplines, such as: sociology, psychology, physics, economics, psychiatry, medicine, law, education, and social work.

A. Life as a process of Growth and Development

1. Erik Erikson (1950) has separately outlined eight stages in life from infancy through old age. Of the eighth stage, he said, "Only he who in some way has taken care of the years and people and has adapted himself to the triumphs and disappointments adherent to beings - only he may gradually grow the fruit of these seven stages."

   The eight stage, the older years, represents a period when the older person developed a basic way of approaching life's problems and relationships, which fall into order or significant meaning.

2. Robert Peck (1956) using Erikson's developmental theory as a basis, suggested the following series of states of adaptations for the middle and last years.

   a. Ego differentiation versus work role preoccupation.

      The primary task of the older adult who has retired from his life of earning a living or raising a family, to

redefine and re-evaluate his self-worth and, in this process to find new satisfactions available to him.

b. Body transcendence versus body preoccupation. A person who has gauged life and happiness by his physical beauty and attractiveness may see himself as finished in the later years with his decreasing physical stamina and loss of standard concepts of attractiveness.

If one can transcend these values and sugstitute feelings of self-worth on the inner qualities and acceptance of the changes, the adjustment to old age will be enriched.

c. Ego transcendence or ego preoccupation. A person who involves himself with community interests, with interests outside of his immediate welfare, has demonstrated his ability to rise above self-interest and to be concerned with others.

3. Robert Havighurst (1961) developed these concepts: older people redefine and re-evaluate their concepts of self-worth; they reach for new ways of achieving satisfaction in areas available to them, and some find alternative patterns of involvement commensurate with their energies and financial means.

4. Any remaining vestiges of awe that may have survived in an unconscious way from early childhood give way in the light of the increasingly obvious helplessness of an aged parent. Hostile feelings emerge and become threatening, for both the parent and child alike. Alater (1964) implies that the adult in relation to his aging parent "angers at the ultimate annihilation of the

child role, the extinction of dependent status, the necessity, on the contrary, of meeting the dependency needs of the parent, and the anticipation of final desertion by the parent through death, begin to make themselves felt."

5. Cumming and Henry (1961) concluded that the pattern of older people is to disengage. The older person withdraws from the concerns which were important in his life development. He retires from work, takes a less active role in the family matters, attends church less frequently, and does not travel as much. The scope of his activities and extent of his involvement become more limited.

B. Conflicts in Attitudes

The changing age composition of the U.S. population and the greatly increased proportion of persons in the older-age categories have drastically altered traditional roles and structure of the family.

1. America is a youthful society. As a pioneering country, its early history is replete with tales of the pursuit of the frontier and the conquest of the West by its younger members. Older persons usually remained attached to a three-generation family group, and handled important tasks in the care and rearing of the young. Today, no frontiers remain for youth to conquer, nor are any youth-rearing tasks left to the care of the older person.
2. An exploding youthful population has caused extreme emphasis to be placed on youth. Today's society seems to give a disproportionate value to youthfulness. The advertising media, television, motion pictures, and popular literature, with their accents on glamour, vividly extol the physical attributes and beatuies of youth.

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3. Mobility by American families has increased, causing many of the problems that now confront older persons. The relocation of younger persons has tended to increase social isolation of the elderly and to detach family and community ties that are important to older persons.

Part II. Demographic Data of Aging

The size of a population depends upon three factors: birth rate, death rate, and migration. Historically, birth and death rates have played a major role, and migration, generally, a minor part in population size. Historically, also, both birth and death rates have been high. However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States, there has been a sharp decline in both mortality and fertility. The change from a high birth rate and a high death rate to a low birth rate and low death rate has been variously designated as the demographic revolution. In the process, the decline in mortality preceeds the decline in fertility, with the result that population growth in the early period is rapid. Then as the decline in fertility begins to catch up with the decline in mortality, the growth stabilizes. The use of age pyramids can best show the comparison of various age structures, because of its graphical presentation.

The major purpose of demographic data is to compare and relate the statistical dimensions of aging within populations. Population characteristics emerge from a host of special condi-

tions that enable men to appraise the work of past and present policies. With the use of demographic data, vague notions and suppositions concerning older participants in Western society are replaced by objective figures and documented hypotheses.

Content Objectives

1. To identify the characteristics of older people with emphasis on the United States population.
2. To evaluate statistics and trends that may aid in predicting the needs and expectations of future aged persons.
3. To gain understanding of socio-economic influences that affect the aged.

I. Facts about Older Americans

A. Population

Every tenth American is 65 years of age or older. There are about 20 million individuals 65 and older in the United States. Fewer than 9 million are men, and more than 11 million are women.

The population of those 65 and older is not a homogeneous group at any given date, the composition of the group is constantly shifting. On an average day, roughly 3,900 people celebrate their 65th birthdays, but almost 3,080 already past 65 will die--a net increase of 820 per day. In the course of a year, this results in a net increase of

300,000. In five years, 35 percent of the population who are 65 and older will be new additions to this age group.

Since 1900, the U.S. population has tripled, but the number of those persons aged 65 has grown sevenfold. At the same time that the older population has been growing much faster that the total population, it has been spending more years in retirement.

A growing proportion of retirees will have older parents still living. The ration of persons aged 80 and over to those aged 60 to 64 was 34 per 100 at the time of the 1970 Census and is expected to double--reaching 67 per 100 by the end of the century.

B. Men-Women Ratio

In 1900 there were 102 older men per 100 older women; today, the situation is dramatically reversed. There are 140 older women per 100 older men and the disparity will grow to an expected 150 older women per 100 older men by the end of the century. The growing differences in male and female life expectancies and the cultural pattern of men marrying women younger than themselves ac-

count for the extent of widowhood; more than half of all older women are widows and their numbers and proportions are increasing. Whereas most of the older men are husbands, most of the older women are widows.

C. Households

Most aged persons live independently in homes they own. Nine out of 10 older men and almost 8 out of 10 women live in their own households either as heads or wives of heads of the household. Of the rest--the majority are in the household of a member of their family rather than in an institution.

D. Education

Fifty percent of the elderly never went beyond elementary school. Nearly 17 percent are illiterate. Only one in twenty is a college graduate.

E. Source of Income

The major single source of income is earnings from employment. In addition, depending on the employee's relative bargaining power, it is their best avenue for adjusting to price inflation. The older American being out of the labor market, suffers from low income. At the turn of the century, two-thirds of the menaged 65 and over were in the labor force;

today, only one-quarter are working or actively seeking work, and most of these are in agriculture or low-income occupations, in self-employment, and in part-time work. Because the older person has no ready means for self-improvement, he is especially vulnerable to the effects of inflation movements.

F. Life Expectancy

Many more people now reach the upper age levels but, once there, do not live much longer than did aged people formerly. Improvements in medical science, sanitation, and nutrition have raised average life expectancy at birth by some twenty years since the turn of the century. However, most of this improvement has been achieved by cutting death rates in infancy, childhood, and young adulthood.

G. Health

Most scientific opinions agree that there are no diseases specifically attributable to old age but that a variety of chronic conditions is considerably more prevalent amoung the aged. Older persons tend to have more frequent and longer hospital stays than do younger people and suffer more days per year of disability.

They see their physicians and dentists less fre-

quently but spend much larger amounts of money on drugs and medicines. Their needed medical care tends to be both long-term and expensive.

Less than five percent of old persons are institutionalized, but of the overwhelming majority who live in the community, only 17 percent have no chronic conditions or illnesses. Most of those who do have such conditions suffer only a minimum of interference with their normal activities. Only 15 percent of the noninstitutionalized aged are unable to carry on their major activities.

Of the aggregate personal health care expenditures in 1969, one-tenth of the population aged 65 and over accounted for about one-quarter of the total spent.

H. Economics

Living in the United States are 6.8 million heads of families who are over 65. Half of them have incomes of less than $3,000 a year, and half of these support their families on less than $1,000 a year.

While the majority of the aged are covered by Social Security, nearly two-thirds of the poorest aged (those living alone and earning less than

$1,000 a year) are not covered by Social Security--that is, four out of every five aged persons is below the poverty level.

Orshansky (1965) stated that to add to the 2.5 million aged persons living alone in poverty and to the 2.7 million who are living in poor families as head, spouse, or relative, those 1.7 million aged relatives who are too poor to get by on their own (but who may be included in the current count of the poor even though the families they live with are above the economy level of the poverty index), the number of impoverished aged would rise to almost 7 million. Therefore, of the population aged 65 or older who are not in istitutions, 40 percent are presently subject to poverty, whether they are facing it in households of their own, or escaping it only by virtue of living with more fortunate relatives.

Many of the aged are ending their lives in poverty because they becan in poverty. Their income throughout their working lives was never sufficient to provide the margin of savings which afforts independence and dignity after retirement. Many aging have receded into poverty because the amount saved has been inadequate and inflation has eroded their

resources.

Orshansky further states that income obviously determines the standard of living of the older population. In 1967, the median income (half had more --half less) of families headed by persons 65 and over ($3,928) and of older persons living alone or with non-relatives ($1,480) was 46 percent of the median income of their under-65 counterparts ($8,504 for families and $3,655 for those alone or with non-relatives.)

Almost half of the aged are poor and they are most unlikely to be able to buy or rent facilities needed to provide adequate living quarters in the city. As they grow older, many of them require changes in living arrangements, necessitating increasing dependency on others.

According to a U.S. Senate (1969) report "sufficient evidence now exists to spotlight certain special economic problems of the aged which compound the general problem of low income. Among the areas identified for immediate congressional attention are: a) Income maintenance of widows, b) Health needs and rising medical costs, c) Employment opportunities in old age, d) Implications of early re-

tirement trends."

II. The Future Aged

Ever though many of the variables needed for reliable predictions about the next 30 years may yet be unknown, Robert Morris (1968) Professor of the Florence Heller Graduate School for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare Brandeis University, in testimony before the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging predicted that, if present trends continue at a relatively even pace, and barring major catastrophies, the following guesses are not wholly unreasonable:

A. "The U.S. population will be approximately 310 million, of whom 30 million will be over the age of 65. Approximately two-thirds of this total, or 20 million persons, will be over the age of 75. It is this latter group--over 75--which consumes health, hospital and nursing services most heavily. . .

B. At least 16 million of all persons over 65 will be single. . .never married. . .widowed or divorced. Three million will lack extensive family relationships upon which we are accustomed to rely in periods of illness or disability.

C. The average life expectancy for adults who reach age 65 will not be much higher than it is today. . . Women, who are longer-lived, can expect to live at least to 80 as an average.

D. More than ever, the problem of age will be dominated by the special needs of aged women.

E. Our technical achievements in the production of goods may reduce the average age for retirement to 60 years. There are already some hundreds of thousands of persons who retire from their major careers before the age of 60. The once happened because of illness; now it is due to the generosity of industrial retirement plans for executive personnel and national generosity for members of the Armed Forces and. . .civil servants.

F. A combination of the last two estimates means that, for the average American, between fifteen and twenty years of human life. . .one-fourth of a man's time on earth becomes "free time" detached from goods-producing labor. Twenty years of time becomes available for the average human being, who must decide what he shall do with his life, rather than having a brief span at the end of a working career to ask "What have I done with my life?"

G. The price level will be 50 percent higher that it is today, given a noninflationary cycle and the recent rate of creeping inflation. By one conservative estimate. . .a worker who retires at full salary which places him in the middle of the income distribution scale. . .will drop to the poverty group

in 15 years. Individuals who accumulate their economic reserve through insurance and social security during the next 30 years, at current price levels, will be faced with a substantial gap between income and prices by the year 2000.

H. The rapid tempo of social and economic and technical change in America will probably continue and even increase. This will isolate the aged more than ever. The American population will be more mobile than ever before. It will be necessary for most adults to consider one or more changes in jobs and careers throughout their adult lives. Families will move more frequently than they do today. Even now, on the average, 20 percent of the urban population changes housing each year, but only half as many persons over 65 move. Constant family moving at this rate leaves the aged behind. It becomes more and more difficult for neighborhoods and families to maintain and sustain the social and physical well-being of older persons who live more and more among strangers.

I. The average aged person in 30 years will be much more like the average middle-aged or youthful adult today. Most will have had a high-school education and almost half will have had some college education. They will be native born, reared in a growing, mobile, and expectant society, and will have many advanced skills.

This contrasts with the present aged, who, as a group are weighted by immigrant origin, have a grade school education or less. . .were reared in a slower and more frugal world, and are less skilled. The golden age center of taday will hardly satisfy the college-educated oldster of the year 2000. Neither will present income, nor a lifetime of inactivity. A majority of all women 65 and older are now widows. The greater longevity of women--another 16 years at age 65 in comparison to 13 years for the men--coupled with the fact that women usually marry men somewhat older, accounts for an increasingly heavy preponderance of widows in the older population, especially at higher ages. Most of the aged in the future will be women and most of these women will be widows. Women 65 and older already outnumber men by a ratio of 134 to 100 and this disproportion is expected to rise to 150 to 100 by 1985. Widows now number 6.2 million; by 1985, the number will soar to more than eight million."